



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Gentiana acaulis which lives upon the when we crossed once then found it home its flowers s. This gentian uts, where as yet un, and no other *amæbuxus*, whose rmingly with its its native home! rm! Deep cups reen, their brims e unopened bud, at morning they e to do anything ep and botanize, or further enjoy- cer. The roots of t to no stem the ower stalk is fur- ited at the base. would be distinct s them. The five ut their filaments Their lower part d uniting around e honey, which is base. The pistil ged. The anthers and seem to twist of the flower the erge during their anthers do really e, not structurally. seen any insects ll be fertilized by both violet, has a It is a somewhat of the bilberry and

juniper bushes on the mountain-side, for it cannot bear uninjured such a hot sun as the gentian seems to enjoy. It is a lovely plant, both leaf and flower, but I have not much to say about it, for although I made one drawing, my specimens faded all too soon for me. At first the flower droops its head, but later it becomes more horizontal and its petals spread out widely. It belongs to the *Liliaceæ* and consequently its ovary is in a different relation to the corolla from that of the narcissus. I wish I knew the meaning of the white-grooved scales at the base of each petal. Perhaps they form apertures to reach the honey by.

Soldanella alpina is the last specimen. To our surprise we came upon a few plants near the summit of Monte Motterone, but they seemed to miss the snow, and did not seem as attractive as usual. It belongs to the primrose family and has five stamens. I made a rough sketch of the stamens and ovary, with its free central placentation, and there I must end; perhaps I may find *Soldanella* again some day. Arcangeli says the name is a diminutive of "soldo," the Italian half-penny, from the form of the leaves.

NATURE NOTES FOR APRIL.

On a morning in early April when the sun shines warm, and a dry pearly haze softens the distant mountains, how many things are there happening in quiet! Even here, in the waters of the beck, where they run tolerably smooth and make but a low sweet murmur, there is a wealth of life. Water-boatmen ply swiftly on the surface, with a stroke of their thin oar-like legs; below, the tiny *Ancylus* clings limpet-like to a stone; while all over the bottom—a mosaic it is, of golden browns, patterned in pebbles and coloured by slanting sunbeams—are dotted the cases of the caddis-worm common to these broad shallow becks. The grubs of the various species of caddis-flies adapt themselves to circumstances as everyone knows, and take such building materials for their houses as come handy. Here in these rough mountain-streams little soft stuff, sand or grass is found to clothe the naked grub-body with; so the species we see here collects the smallest stones it can find, dovetails them together (what a work of care and time this must be, and

how beautifully achieved!) and by a secretion of its own manufacture, glues or mortars them tightly around itself. Thus completely encrusted by a mail-coat of masonry, and ready to bear even a stout current of water, it sallies forth, mounts a stone, and anchors itself firmly thereon. So securely and comfortably is it fixed, that it seems wanton to dislodge it even for a minute, and to slip off a tile from its roof (which needs pressure, for there is no slate loose about the caddis!) in order to peep inside to see what it is like. Then we put it back, almost ashamed of our intrusion; for it is plain that the shy grub whose face we thus expose, has no desire whatever to make our acquaintance. Above the beck, all sorts of things are in progress. The primrose peeps from the bank; and the purple willows that fringe the water on one side, suspend their long slim catkins, which are already losing the cayenne-pepper colour that showed upon their unfolded stamens. From the other side a stalwart young oak tree stretches its stout arms across the babbling water. There, upon the bare bough, is a nest, the whole mossy cup complete! So eager has a sunny season made this pair of mated Chaffinches, that they could not wait the bursting of the green, to build in security the home of their offspring to be. It is plain to be seen; for the two short twigs that give it support and still bear two dead leaves of last year, are no protection. All is quiet; yet look! Close on a bough behind, still and silent as a statue, is the little hen, watching the danger, all her heart of fear with the new-made cradle. For with love comes first anxiety; along with the joy, is not pain sure to follow close? The cock is there too, either less anxious or more prudent, for he is farther away. And so they stay, till the wayfarer passes on; when they fly joyously after each other with a weak conjugal chirp, and the cock comes down to the nest to find it safe, and to perch proudly by it. What a marplot man seems to be in nature's joys!

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The Chiff-chaff heads the hosts of April comers. First in loneliness does he spring about the bare hazels, practising his name in a dozen different ways, while above him, where the steep wood ends in precipice, the great mauve Ring-doves sit on the heavier boughs and coo, or wing down to the big beeches, where, ambling on short legs, they still search the

ground for last year's frost. On the night of the month of the south-west, come of plantation abuts on scree, two male birds themselves in closest and so strictly are the of a big hazel and chiefly the curiosity that arouses attention wonderful is the sight there from scree to conscious of each other into that "play" which particularly, a contest how, gorgeous as each sight the instant it is back as well, merge a bracken of the ground line do not show up a sunshine. And, in short flight is over, quick darts and sudden but when once the two into air in unguarded shining through spread just two bands of rainbow and about the motion amazing the perching on a twig, giving vent to a heated Settled sunshine with resurrection of Nature festival actually embracing goddess or impersonified named Eastre. Prim the meadows everywhere pollen on the wind. bushes offer honey; standing in the golden expanded crowd of winged creatures

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ground for last year's fruit. Then others follow. Upon the 10th night of the month or thereabouts, if the wind be in the south-west, come the first of Redstarts. Where a wall of plantation abuts on the southern face of a bush-sprinkled scree, two male birds may be found next morning keeping themselves in closest ambush. No sound escapes them, and so strictly are their movements limited to the shade of a big hazel and holly bush intermingled, that it is chiefly the curiosity of other species of birds about them that arouses attention. But, once in ambush oneself, how wonderful is the sight! The two creatures flit here and there from scree to thorn, from thorn to rock, highly conscious of each other, even while feeding, and often drawn into that "play" which seems to be, in the Redstart particularly, a contest of beauty. It is surprising to notice how, gorgeous as each bird's colours are, they are lost to sight the instant it settles; rosy breast and red tail, grey back as well, merge at once into the grey stones and russet bracken of the ground. Even black head and sharp throat-line do not show up among the stone-shadows of the strong sunshine. And, in the bird's absolute stillness, once its short flight is over, no doubt great protection lies. These quick darts and sudden vanishments quite confuse the eye; but when once the two, after drawing jealously together, fling into air in unguarded pursuit, what a sight does sunlight shining through spread feathers make! No bird-form at all, just two bands of rapidly circling flame, that go twisting round and about the bare little thorn! Ribbons of fire; motion amazing the eye; till separating, one bird is seen perching on a twig, showing form as well as colour, and giving vent to a heated "hui, hui."

Settled sunshine warming the earth brings a sudden resurrection of Nature at Easter-time, so that the Christian festival actually embraces that of Spring, whose Anglo-Saxon goddess or impersonification, the venerable Bede tells us, was named Eastre. Primroses peep; celandines lately rare, star the meadows everywhere. Wych-elm flower showers its pollen on the wind. The "palm" expands. Pistillate bushes offer honey; staminate ones lose their silvery silkiness in the golden expanded bosses, whose almond scent draws a crowd of winged creatures to sip their sweets. For now, to

greet sunshine and flowers of this spring, comes forth the buried life of last year—bees and wasps and gay butterflies of the *Vanessa* family, chiefly the common tortoiseshell, that have just awakened from their long winter sleep. The toad, even, creeps forth in sombre brownness, happy as the rest, no doubt. Soon the Willow-warbler, an abundant little bird that is one of the most essential signs of our northern spring, asserts his presence. In the third week of the month, when the mists slowly rise after a gracious rain, and the sunshine sparkles on the cloud-shadowed lake, two males together (hens and pairing time not yet come) sing in the bushes of a promontory in mellifluous though still unpractised accent. The bird stays long in the palm-bush, using its catkins as an insect decoy for himself, and fluttering after the flies that seek them. He is very much at ease, such leisure does there seem here after his long and toilsome journey! The bushes are bare, but below them the wind-flowers open flower and leaf together. Behind the rock-bluff (from which the dipper strangely flits—for why has he deserted his water-in-motion?) the damp ground is covered with fruiting mosses, and with those delicate translucent stalks that bear the spore-cases of the liverwort. And by the river shore the new-come Sandpiper disturbed flits across the water. How early he is! But he is quite alone yet, and silent; he contents himself with resting among the sprouting grasses, at which, after a balancing motion of his hind parts, he proceeds to peck. Then what loud jubilation is this from the sky? See, there comes, on a sightless path above, a Swallow, just one! passing swiftly onward, high up, in eager joy. Towards the end of the month the Tree-pipit swings himself, in full-throated melody, from one oak tree to another, and calls his final “tsweet,” “tsweet” in the bough, for another precious minute. Another looked-for migrant! And while this happens, and yellow Willow-warblers whisk about the lower trees and sing, there comes a flock of perhaps sixty large birds, in two straggling parties (attended by a curious Rook or two), and pitch into the tops of the bare oak trees. Fieldfares actually! Thus do summer and winter touch hands; and birds that will nest in northern pine-woods rest side by side with birds from Mediterranean shore. It is remarkable how interested birds are in one another, and how

curious they are. The Field no sooner hear the tones of the slope than they betray the farthestmost of them, and to add their “sheck-sh” to the skirling fife-like wh about the 25th, earlier or for everyone to hear; while melody is fairly afloat, many warblers sing on every hand have arrived; the males pairing has begun.

The years differ somewhat of the birds, and yet more. This is realised best in a from notes taken throughout station. The dates in books of flowers in extreme seas

Gelandine

(*Ranunculus Ficaria*)

March Marigold

(*Caltha palustris*)

Willow Grass

(*Erophila vulgaris*)

Anemone

(*Anemone nemorosa*)

Daffodil

(*Narcissus pseudo-narcissus*)

Goldilocks

(*Ranunculus auricomus*)

Blackthorn

(*Prunus spinosa*)

Buttercup

(*R. bulbosus*)

Cowslip

(*Primula veris*)

Lady's Smock

(*Cardamine pratensis*)

Blue Bell

(*Scilla festalis*)

Early Purple Orchis

(*Orchis mascula*)

Here it is easy to see years, 1865 and 1879 lat

curious they are. The Fieldfares, shyly resting in the boughs, no sooner hear the tones of a Starling-concert going on below the slope than they betray excitement by low shrill cries, and the farthestmost of them move nearer to join in the noise, and to add their "sheck-shecks," that sound like drum-taps, to the skirling fife-like whistles of the starlings. Finally, about the 25th, earlier or later, the Cuckoo sounds his note for everyone to hear; while in the last week of April spring melody is fairly afloat, midst budding green, and Willow-warblers sing on every hand! Hen Redstarts by that time have arrived; the males are scattered and stationed, and pairing has begun.

MARY L. ARMITT.

The years differ somewhat one from another in the coming of the birds, and yet more in the blooming of the flowers. This is realised best in a list such as the following made up from notes taken through a long set of years in a southern station. The dates in both columns are of the first opening of flowers in extreme seasons, early and late.

Celandine (<i>Ranunculus Ficaria</i>)	January 3rd, 1883	March 6th, 1865
March Marigold (<i>Caltha palustris</i>)	January 14th, 1883	April 13th, 1865
Whitlow Grass (<i>Erophila vulgaris</i>)	January 20th, 1882	April 25th, 1879
Anemone (<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>)	February 11th, 1883	April 6th, 1865
Daffodil (<i>Narcissus pseudo-narcissus</i>)	February 12th, 1884	April 4th, 1865
Goldilocks (<i>Ranunculus auricomus</i>)	February 22nd, 1882	April 24th, 1877
Blackthorn (<i>Prunus spinosa</i>)	February 20th, 1869	May 5th, 1879
Buttercup (<i>R. bulbosus</i>)	March 1st, 1882	April 27th, 1879
Cowslip (<i>Primula veris</i>)	March 16th, 1882	April 26th, 1879
Lady's Smock (<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>)	March 13th, 1872	April 26th, 1879
Blue Bell (<i>Scilla festalis</i>)	March 27th, 1882	May 5th, 1879
Early Purple Orchis (<i>Orchis mascula</i>)	April 1st, 1882	May 10th, 1879

Here it is easy to see that 1882, 1883 and 1884 were early years, 1865 and 1879 late ones. This present year, in spite

of the mild winter, is not an early one, but however late it may be, all the above common flowers, or almost all of them will be flowering in April. There are some flowers of which one cannot record a first flowering date, because like the Primrose, or Daisy, or Groundsel, they are liable to flower at any time, even December.

April is one of the best months of the year for noticing the flowers of the trees. The Yew is perhaps the earliest to flower of the larger trees, with its two sorts of flowers. The staminate ones which produce the pollen, that is to be scattered by the wind, are therefore multitudinous and not to be overlooked; a lens is almost necessary to understand their structure. The others, the pistillate ones, are on other trees and much harder to find; it is best to look for them when the others have been out some time and have lost almost all their pollen. I have found them quite in perfection in early April and they are so pretty they are worth finding. The tiny flower is enclosed partially in pinkish scales, only its apex shows between them, ending in a point-like opening; on a fine day, a clear drop of fluid stands on the top of the flower on the little opening, the pollen grains wafted by the wind are caught on this drop and in the evening are absorbed at the same time with the drop. These tiny flowers are only ovules in a simple case, but one can find upon the stalk of the ovule the small wall of tissue, which for a long time, even till June, remains stationary and then begins to grow and forms the bright red cup which in autumn encloses the base of the ripe seed. In early April the Ash trees are generally in full flower, their earliest date for opening being March 23rd, and their latest April 28th. These are dates for the south of England, in the north everything is later. Ash flowers are worth noticing, particularly when gathered from several trees, for they vary so very much; some trees produce staminate or male flowers only, though there may be stunted pistils which do not act and so no fruit is produced; other trees bear pistillate or female flowers only, again abortive stamens may be there but without pollen and these getting fertilized from other trees may bear fruit well; again there are trees with flowers perfect in themselves, having both pollen and pistils and bearing good fruit in due season. All three forms are interesting to see and understand, and even

to draw, when one understands generally get to the branch flower. Some trees are, however, at the top, like the Poplars, for a storm that strews the damaged catkins. The Beech until they are over and fall of Beech flowers and it is on bunches that come down in on the road as thick and as looks fancy the ends of building, and pull off m. chopping them and so giving young and either unwithered. The acorns of the great most interesting stages can since the average date of the earliest that I April 20th.

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to draw, when one understands them best of all. One can generally get to the branch of an Ash tree to procure the flower. Some trees are, however, so difficult, bearing flowers at the top, like the Poplars or Hornbeam, that one is grateful for a storm that strews the road beneath with probably only damaged catkins. The Beech flowers, too, are unattainable until they are over and fall naturally. There are two sorts of Beech flowers and it is only the soft long-stemmed stamen bunches that come down in thousands and thousands and lie on the road as thick and as soft as an eiderdown quilt. The rooks fancy the ends of Beech branches for their nest building, and pull off many of them, sometimes kindly dropping them and so giving one a chance to examine the young and either unwithered or undeveloped flowers.

The acorns of the great Oak trees in their earliest and most interesting stages can hardly be looked for in April, since the average date of the first open flower is May 13th, and the earliest that I have found recorded as late as April 20th.

SOPHIA ARMITT.